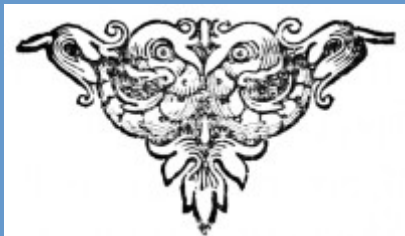


LITTLE BLUE ANEW  
A POCKET STORY-BOOK



*Featuring works by:*  
*Mark Twain*  
*W.W. Jacobs*  
*Hamlin Garland*  
*Anna Katherine Green*

## THE INVALID'S STORY.

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Merry Tales*, by Mark Twain

I seem sixty and married, but these effects are due to my condition and sufferings, for I am a bachelor, and only forty-one. It will be hard for you to believe that I, who am now but a shadow, was a hale, hearty man two short years ago,—a man of iron, a very athlete!—yet such is the simple truth. But stranger still than this fact is the way in which I lost my health. I lost it through helping to take care of a box of guns on a two-hundred-mile railway journey one winter's night. It is the actual truth, and I will tell you about it.

I belong in Cleveland, Ohio. One winter's night, two years ago, I reached home just after dark, in a driving

snow-storm, and the first  
thing I heard when I entered the house  
was that my dearest boyhood  
friend and schoolmate, John B. Hackett,  
had died the day before, and  
that his last utterance had been a desire  
that I would take his remains  
home to his poor old father and mother in  
Wisconsin. I was greatly  
shocked and grieved, but there was no  
time to waste in emotions; I must  
start at once. I took the card, marked  
“Deacon Levi Hackett, Bethlehem,  
Wisconsin,” and hurried off through the  
whistling storm to the railway  
station. Arrived there I found the long  
white-pine box which had been  
described to me; I fastened the card to it  
with some tacks, saw it put  
safely aboard the express car, and then  
ran into the eating-room to  
provide myself with a sandwich and  
some cigars. When I returned,  
presently, there was my coffin-box \_back

again\_, apparently, and a young fellow examining around it, with a card in his hand, and some tacks and a hammer! I was astonished and puzzled. He began to nail on his card, and I rushed out to the express car, in a good deal of a state of mind, to ask for an explanation. But no—there was my box, all right, in the express car; it hadn't been disturbed. [The fact is that without my suspecting it a prodigious mistake had been made. I was carrying off a box of \_guns\_ which that young fellow had come to the station to ship to a rifle company in Peoria, Illinois, and \_he\_ had got my corpse!] Just then the conductor sung out "All aboard," and I jumped into the express car and got a comfortable seat on a bale of buckets. The expressman was there, hard at work,—a plain man of fifty, with a simple, honest, good-natured face, and a breezy, practical

heartiness in his general style. As the train moved off a stranger skipped into the car and set a package of peculiarly mature and capable Limburger cheese on one end of my coffin-box—I mean my box of guns. That is to say, I know now that it was Limburger cheese, but at that time I never had heard of the article in my life, and of course was wholly ignorant of its character. Well, we sped through the wild night, the bitter storm raged on, a cheerless misery stole over me, my heart went down, down, down! The old expressman made a brisk remark or two about the tempest and the arctic weather, slammed his sliding doors to, and bolted them, closed his window down tight, and then went bustling around, here and there and yonder, setting things to rights, and all the time contentedly humming “Sweet By and By,” in a low tone, and

flattering a good deal. Presently I began to detect a most evil and searching odor stealing about on the frozen air. This depressed my spirits still more, because of course I attributed it to my poor departed friend. There was something infinitely saddening about his calling himself to my remembrance in this dumb pathetic way, so it was hard to keep the tears back. Moreover, it distressed me on account of the old expressman, who, I was afraid, might notice it. However, he went humming tranquilly on, and gave no sign; and for this I was grateful. Grateful, yes, but still uneasy; and soon I began to feel more and more uneasy every minute, for every minute that went by that odor thickened up the more, and got to be more and more gamy and hard to stand. Presently, having got things arranged to his satisfaction, the expressman got some

wood and made up a tremendous fire  
in his stove. This distressed me more  
than I can tell, for I could not  
but feel that it was a mistake. I was sure  
that the effect would be  
deleterious upon my poor departed  
friend. Thompson—the expressman's  
name

was Thompson, as I found out in the  
course of the night—now went poking  
around his car, stopping up whatever  
stray cracks he could find,  
remarking that it didn't make any  
difference what kind of a night it was  
outside, he calculated to make us  
comfortable, anyway. I said nothing,  
but I believed he was not choosing the  
right way. Meantime he was  
humming to himself just as before; and  
meantime, too, the stove was  
getting hotter and hotter, and the place  
closer and closer. I felt  
myself growing pale and qualmish, but  
grieved in silence and said

nothing. Soon I noticed that the “Sweet By and By” was gradually fading out; next it ceased altogether, and there was an ominous stillness.

After a few moments Thompson said,—

“Pfew! I reckon it ain’t no cinnamon ’t I’ve loaded up thish-yer stove with!”

He gasped once or twice, then moved toward the cof—gun-box, stood over that Limburger cheese part of a moment, then came back and sat down near me, looking a good deal impressed. After a contemplative pause, he said, indicating the box with a gesture,—

“Friend of yourn?”

“Yes,” I said with a sigh.

“He’s pretty ripe, \_ain’t\_ he!”



Nothing further was said for perhaps a couple of minutes, each being busy with his own thoughts; then Thompson said, in a low, awed voice,—

“Sometimes it’s uncertain whether they’re really gone or not,—\_seem\_ gone, you know—body warm, joints limber—and so, although you \_think\_ they’re gone, you don’t really know. I’ve had cases in my car. It’s perfectly awful, becuz \_you\_ don’t know what minute they’ll rise up and look at you!” Then, after a pause, and slightly lifting his elbow toward the box,— “But \_he\_ ain’t in no trance! No, sir, I go bail for \_him\_!”

We sat some time, in meditative silence, listening to the wind and the roar of the train; then Thompson said, with a good deal of feeling,—

“Well-a-well, we’ve all got to go, they

ain't no getting around it. Man  
that is born of woman is of few days and  
far between, as Scriptur' says.

Yes, you look at it any way you want to,  
it's awful solemn and cur'us:

they ain't \_nobody\_ can get around it;

\_all's\_ got to go—just

\_everybody\_, as you may say. One day  
you're hearty and strong"—here he  
scrambled to his feet and broke a pane  
and stretched his nose out at it

a moment or two, then sat down again  
while I struggled up and thrust my  
nose out at the same place, and this we  
kept on doing every now and

then—"and next day he's cut down like  
the grass, and the places which  
knowed him then knows him no more  
forever, as Scriptur' says.

Yes'ndeedy, it's awful solemn and  
cur'us; but we've all got to go, one  
time or another; they ain't no getting  
around it."

There was another long pause; then,—

“What did he die of?”

I said I didn’t know.

“How long has he ben dead?”

It seemed judicious to enlarge the facts to fit the probabilities; so I said,—

“Two or three days.”

But it did no good; for Thompson received it with an injured look which plainly said, “Two or three \_years\_, you mean.” Then he went right along, placidly ignoring my statement, and gave his views at considerable length upon the unwisdom of putting off burials too long. Then he lounged off toward the box, stood a moment, then came back on a

sharp trot and visited the broken pane,  
observing,—

“’Twould ’a’ ben a dum sight better, all  
around, if they’d started him  
along last summer.”

Thompson sat down and buried his face  
in his red silk handkerchief, and  
began to slowly sway and rock his body  
like one who is doing his best to  
endure the almost unendurable. By this  
time the fragrance—if you may  
call it fragrance—was just about  
suffocating, as near as you can come at  
it. Thompson’s face was turning gray; I  
knew mine hadn’t any color left  
in it. By and by Thompson rested his  
forehead in his left hand, with his  
elbow on his knee, and sort of waved his  
red handkerchief towards the  
box with his other hand, and said,—

“I’ve carried a many a one of ’em,—

some of 'em considerable overdue,  
too,—but, lordy, he just lays over 'em  
all!—and does it \_easy\_. Cap.,  
they was heliotrope to \_him\_!”

This recognition of my poor friend  
gratified me, in spite of the sad  
circumstances, because it had so much  
the sound of a compliment.

Pretty soon it was plain that something  
had got to be done. I suggested  
cigars. Thompson thought it was a good  
idea. He said,—

“Likely it’ll modify him some.”

We puffed gingerly along for a while, and  
tried hard to imagine that  
things were improved. But it wasn’t any  
use. Before very long, and  
without any consultation, both cigars  
were quietly dropped from our  
nerveless fingers at the same moment.

Thompson said, with a sigh,—

“No, Cap., it don’t modify him worth a cent. Fact is, it makes him worse, becuz it appears to stir up his ambition. What do you reckon we better do, now?”

I was not able to suggest anything; indeed, I had to be swallowing and swallowing, all the time, and did not like to trust myself to speak.

Thompson fell to maundering, in a desultory and low-spirited way, about the miserable experiences of this night; and he got to referring to my poor friend by various titles,—sometimes military ones, sometimes civil ones; and I noticed that as fast as my poor friend’s effectiveness grew, Thompson promoted him accordingly,—gave him a bigger title. Finally he said,—

“I’ve got an idea. Suppos’n we buckle down to it and give the Colonel a bit of a shove towards t’other end of the car?—about ten foot, say. He wouldn’t have so much influence, then, don’t you reckon?”

I said it was a good scheme. So we took in a good fresh breath at the broken pane, calculating to hold it till we got through; then we went there and bent over that deadly cheese and took a grip on the box. Thompson nodded “All ready,” and then we threw ourselves forward with all our might; but Thompson slipped, and slumped down with his nose on the cheese, and his breath got loose. He gagged and gasped, and floundered up and made a break for the door, pawing the air and saying, hoarsely, “Don’t hender me!—gimme the road! I’m a-dying; gimme the road!” Out on the cold platform I sat

down and held his head a while,  
and he revived. Presently he said,—

“Do you reckon we started the Gen’rul  
any?”

I said no; we hadn’t budged him.

“Well, then, \_that\_ idea’s up the flume.  
We got to think up something  
else. He’s suited wher’ he is, I reckon;  
and if that’s the way he feels  
about it, and has made up his mind that  
he don’t wish to be disturbed,  
you bet he’s a-going to have his own way  
in the business. Yes, better  
leave him right wher’ he is, long as he  
wants it so; becuz he holds all  
the trumps, don’t you know, and so it  
stands to reason that the man that  
lays out to alter his plans for him is going  
to get left.”

But we couldn’t stay out there in that



mad storm; we should have frozen to death. So we went in again and shut the door, and began to suffer once more and take turns at the break in the window. By and by, as we were starting away from a station where we had stopped a moment Thompson pranced in cheerily, and exclaimed,—

“We’re all right, now! I reckon we’ve got the Commodore this time. I judge I’ve got the stuff here that’ll take the tuck out of him.”

It was carbolic acid. He had a carboy of it. He sprinkled it all around everywhere; in fact he drenched everything with it, rifle-box, cheese and all. Then we sat down, feeling pretty hopeful. But it wasn’t for long. You see the two perfumes began to mix, and then—well, pretty soon we made a break for the door; and out there Thompson swabbed his face

with his bandanna and said in a kind of disheartened way,—

“It ain’t no use. We can’t buck agin \_him\_. He just utilizes everything we put up to modify him with, and gives it his own flavor and plays it back on us. Why, Cap., don’t you know, it’s as much as a hundred times worse in there now than it was when he first got a-going. I never \_did\_ see one of ’em warm up to his work so, and take such a dummation interest in it. No, sir, I never did, as long as I’ve ben on the road; and I’ve carried a many a one of ’em, as I was telling you.”

We went in again, after we were frozen pretty stiff; but my, we couldn’t \_stay\_ in, now. So we just waltzed back and forth, freezing, and thawing, and stifling, by turns. In about an hour we stopped at another

station; and as we left it Thompson came in with a bag, and said,—

“Cap., I’m a-going to chance him once more,—just this once; and if we don’t fetch him this time, the thing for us to do, is to just throw up the sponge and withdraw from the canvass. That’s the way \_I\_ put it up.”

He had brought a lot of chicken feathers, and dried apples, and leaf tobacco, and rags, and old shoes, and sulphur, and assafoetida, and one thing or another; and he piled them on a breadth of sheet iron in the middle of the floor, and set fire to them. When they got well started, I couldn’t see, myself, how even the corpse could stand it. All that went before was just simply poetry to that smell,—but mind you, the original smell stood up out of it just as sublime as ever,—fact is, these other

smells just seemed to give it a better hold; and my, how rich it was! I didn't make these reflections there—there wasn't time—made them on the platform. And breaking for the platform, Thompson got suffocated and fell; and before I got him dragged out, which I did by the collar, I was mighty near gone myself. When we revived, Thompson said dejectedly,—

“We got to stay out here, Cap. We got to do it. They ain't no other way. The Governor wants to travel alone, and he's fixed so he can outvote us.”

And presently he added,—

“And don't you know, we're \_pisoned\_. It's \_our\_ last trip, you can make up your mind to it. Typhoid fever is what's going to come of this. I feel it a-coming right now. Yes, sir, we're

elected, just as sure as  
you're born."

We were taken from the platform an hour later, frozen and insensible, at the next station, and I went straight off into a virulent fever, and never knew anything again for three weeks. I found out, then, that I had spent that awful night with a harmless box of rifles and a lot of innocent cheese; but the news was too late to save me; imagination had done its work, and my health was permanently shattered; neither Bermuda nor any other land can ever bring it back to me. This is my last trip; I am on my way home to die.



## **THE SKIPPER OF THE “OSPREY”**

Project Gutenberg, *Many Cargoes*, by  
W.W. Jacobs

It was a quarter to six in the morning as the mate of the sailing-barge Osprey came on deck and looked round for the master, who had been sleeping ashore and was somewhat overdue. Ten minutes passed before he appeared on the wharf, and the mate saw with surprise that he was leaning on the arm of a pretty girl of twenty, as he hobbled painfully down to the barge.

“Here you are then,” said the mate, his face clearing. “I began to think you weren't coming.”

“I'm not,” said the skipper; “I've got the gout crool bad. My darter here's going to take my place, an' I'm

going to take it easy in bed for a bit.”

“I'll go an' make it for you,” said the mate.

“I mean my bed at home,” said the skipper sharply. “I want good nursing an' attention.”

The mate looked puzzled.

“But you don't really mean to say this young lady is coming aboard instead of you?” he said.

“That's just what I do mean,” said the skipper. “She knows as much about it as I do. She lived aboard with me until she was quite a big girl.

You'll take your orders from her. What are you whistling about? Can't I do as I like about my own ship?”

“O' course you can,” said the mate drily;  
“an' I s'pose I can whistle if  
I like—I never heard no orders against  
it.”

“Gimme a kiss, Meg, an' git aboard,” said  
the skipper, leaning on his  
stick and turning his cheek to his  
daughter, who obediently gave him a  
perfunctory kiss on the left eyebrow, and  
sprang lightly aboard the  
barge.

“Cast off,” said she, in a business-like  
manner, as she seized a  
boat-hook and pushed off from the jetty.  
“Ta ta, Dad, and go straight  
home, mind; the cab's waiting.”

“Ay, ay, my dear,” said the proud father,  
his eye moistening with  
paternal pride as his daughter, throwing  
off her jacket, ran and  
assisted the mate with the sail. “Lord,



what a fine boy she would have made!”

He watched the barge until she was well under way, and then, waving his hand to his daughter, crawled slowly back to the cab; and, being to a certain extent a believer in homeopathy, treated his complaint with a glass of rum.

“I'm sorry your father's so bad, miss,” said the mate, who was still somewhat dazed by the recent proceedings, as the girl came up and took the wheel from him. “He was complaining a goodish bit all the way up.”

“A wilful man must have his way,” said Miss Cringle, with a shake of her head. “It's no good me saying anything, because directly my back's turned he has his own way again.”

The mate shook his head despondently.

“You'd better get your bedding up and make your arrangements forward,” said the new skipper presently. There was a look of indulgent admiration in the mate's eye, and she thought it necessary to check it.

“All right,” said the other, “plenty of time for that; the river's a little bit thick just now.”

“What do you mean?” inquired the girl hastily.

“Some o' these things are not so careful as they might be,” said the mate, noting the ominous sparkle of her eye, “an' they might scrape the paint off.”

“Look here, my lad,” said the new

skipper grimly, "if you think you can steer better than me, you'd better keep it to yourself, that's all. Now suppose you see about your bedding, as I said."

The mate went, albeit he was rather surprised at himself for doing so, and hid his annoyance and confusion beneath the mattress which he brought up on his head. His job completed, he came aft again, and, sitting on the hatches, lit his pipe.

"This is just the weather for a pleasant cruise," he said amiably, after a few whiffs. "You've chose a nice time for it."

"I don't mind the weather," said the girl, who fancied that there was a little latent sarcasm somewhere. "I think you'd better wash the decks now."

“Washed 'em last night,” said the mate,  
without moving.

“Ah, after dark, perhaps,” said the girl.  
“Well, I think I'll have them  
done again.”

The mate sat pondering rebelliously for a  
few minutes, then he removed  
his jacket, put on in honour of the new  
skipper, and, fetching the  
bucket and mop, silently obeyed orders.

“You seem to be very fond of sitting  
down,” remarked the girl, after he  
had finished; “can't you find something  
else to do?”

“I don't know,” replied the mate slowly;  
“I thought you were looking  
after that.”

The girl bit her lip, and was looking

carefully round her, when they were both disturbed by the unseemly behaviour of the master of a passing craft.

“Jack!” he yelled in a tone of strong amazement, “Jack!”

“Halloa!” cried the mate.

“Why didn't you tell us?” yelled the other reproachfully.

“Tell you what?” roared the mystified mate.

The master of the other craft, holding on to the stays with one hand, jerked his thumb expressively towards Miss Cringle, and waited.

“When was it?” he screamed anxiously, as he realised that his craft was rapidly carrying him out of earshot.

The mate smiled feebly, and glanced uneasily at the girl, who, with a fine colour and an air of vast unconcern, was looking straight in front of her; and it was a relief to both of them when they found themselves hesitating and dodging in front of a schooner which was coming up.

“Do you want all the river?” demanded the exasperated master of the latter vessel, running to the side as they passed. “Why don't you drop anchor if you want to spoon?”

“Perhaps you 'd better let me take the wheel a bit,” said the mate, not without a little malice in his voice.

“No; you can go an' keep a look-out in the bows,” said the girl serenely. “It'll prevent misunderstandings, too. Better take the

potatoes with you and peel them for dinner.”

The mate complied, and the voyage proceeded in silence, the steering being rendered a little nicer than usual by various nautical sparks bringing their boats a bit closer than was necessary in order to obtain a good view of the fair steersman.

After dinner, the tide having turned and a stiff head-wind blowing, they brought up off Sheppey. It began to rain hard, and the crew of the Osprey, having made all snug above, retired to the cabin to resume their quarrel.

“Don't mind me,” said Miss Cringle scathingly, as the mate lit his pipe.

“Well, I didn't think you minded,” replied the mate; “the old man”—

“Who?” interrupted Miss Cringle, in a tone of polite inquiry.

“Captain Cringle,” said the mate, correcting himself, “smokes a great deal, and I've heard him say that you liked the smell of it.”

“There's pipes and pipes,” said Miss Cringle oracularly.

The mate flung his on the floor and crunched it beneath his heel, then he thrust his hands in his pockets, and, leaning back, scowled darkly up at the rain as it crackled on the skylight.

“If you are going to show off your nasty temper,” said the girl severely, “you'd better go forward. It's not quite the thing after all for you to be down here—not that I study appearances much.”



“I shouldn't think you did,” retorted the mate, whose temper was rapidly getting the better of him. “I can't think what your father was thinking of to let a pret—to let a girl like you come away like this.”

“If you were going to say pretty girl,” said Miss Cringle, with calm self-abnegation, “don't mind me, say it. The captain knows what he's about. He told me you were a milksop; he said you were a good young man and a teetotaller.”

The mate, allowing the truth of the captain's statement as to his abstinence, hotly denied the charge of goodness. “I can understand your father's hurry to get rid of you for a spell,” he concluded, being goaded beyond all consideration of politeness. “His gout 'ud never get

well while you were with him. More than that, I shouldn't wonder if you were the cause of it.”

With this parting shot he departed, before the girl could think of a suitable reply, and went and sulked in the dingy little fo'c'sle.

In the evening, the weather having moderated somewhat, and the tide being on the ebb, they got under way again, the girl coming on deck fully attired in an oilskin coat and sou'-wester to resume the command. The rain fell steadily as they ploughed along their way, guided by the bright eye of the “Mouse” as it shone across the darkening waters. The mate, soaked to the skin, was at the wheel.

“Why don't you go below and put your oilskins on?” inquired the girl,

when this fact dawned upon her.

“Don't want 'em,” said the mate.

“I suppose you know best,” said the girl,  
and said no more until nine  
o'clock, when she paused at the  
companion to give her last orders for  
the night.

“I'm going to turn in,” said she; “call me  
at two o'clock. Good-night.”

“Good-night,” said the other, and the girl  
vanished.

Left to himself, the mate, who began to  
feel chilly, felt in his pockets  
for a pipe, and was in all the stress of  
getting a light, when he heard  
a thin, almost mild voice behind him,  
and, looking round, saw the face  
of the girl at the companion.

“I say, are these your oilskins I've been wearing?” she demanded awkwardly.

“You're quite welcome,” said the mate.

“Why didn't you tell me?” said the girl indignantly. “I wouldn't have worn them for anything if I had known it.”

“Well, they won't poison you,” said the mate resentfully. “Your father left his at Ipswich to have 'em cobbled up a bit.”

The girl passed them up on the deck, and, closing the companion with a bang, disappeared. It is possible that the fatigues of the day had been too much for her, for when she awoke, and consulted the little silver watch that hung by her bunk, it was past five o'clock, and the red glow

of the sun was flooding the cabin as she arose and hastily dressed.

The deck was drying in white patches as she went above, and the mate was sitting yawning at the wheel, his eyelids red for want of sleep.

“Didn't I tell you to call me at two o'clock?” she demanded, confronting him.

“It's all right,” said the mate. “I thought when you woke would be soon enough. You looked tired.”

“I think you'd better go when we get to Ipswich,” said the girl, tightening her lips. “I'll ship somebody who'll obey orders.”

“I'll go when we get back to London,” said the mate. “I'll hand this barge over to the cap'n, and nobody else.”

“Well, we'll see,” said the girl, as she took the wheel, “I think you'll go at Ipswich.”

For the remainder of the voyage the subject was not alluded to; the mate, in a spirit of sulky pride, kept to the fore part of the boat, except when he was steering, and, as far as practicable, the girl ignored his presence. In this spirit of mutual forbearance they entered the Orwell, and ran swiftly up to Ipswich.

It was late in the afternoon when they arrived there, and the new skipper, waiting only until they were made fast, went ashore, leaving the mate in charge. She had been gone about an hour when a small telegraph boy appeared, and, after boarding the barge in the unsafest manner possible, handed him a telegram.

The mate read it and his face flushed. With even more than the curtness customary in language at a halfpenny a word, it contained his dismissal.

“I've had a telegram from your father sacking me,” he said to the girl, as she returned soon after, laden with small parcels.

“Yes, I wired him to,” she replied calmly. “I suppose you'll go NOW?”

“I'd rather go back to London with you,” he said slowly.

“I daresay,” said the girl. “As a matter of fact I wasn't really meaning for you to go, but when you said you wouldn't I thought we'd see who was master. I've shipped another mate, so you see I haven't lost much time.”

“Who is he,” inquired the mate.

“Man named Charlie Lee,” replied the girl; “the foreman here told me of him.”

“He'd no business too,” said the mate, frowning; “he's a loose fish; take my advice now and ship somebody else. He's not at all the sort of chap I'd choose for you to sail with.”

“You'd choose,” said the girl scornfully; “dear me, what a pity you didn't tell me before.”

“He's a public-house loafer,” said the mate, meeting her eye angrily, “and about as bad as they make 'em; but I s'pose you'll have your own way.”

“He won't frighten me,” said the girl. “I'm quite capable of taking care



of myself, thank you. Good evening.”

The mate stepped ashore with a small bundle, leaving the remainder of his possessions to go back to London with the barge. The girl watched his well-knit figure as it strode up the quay until it was out of sight, and then, inwardly piqued because he had not turned round for a parting glance, gave a little sigh, and went below to tea.

The docile and respectful behaviour of the new-comer was a pleasant change to the autocrat of the Osprey, and cargoes were worked out and in without an unpleasant word. They laid at the quay for two days, the new mate, whose home was at Ipswich, sleeping ashore, and on the morning of the third he turned up punctually at six o'clock, and they started on their return voyage.

“Well, you do know how to handle a craft,” said Lee admiringly, as they passed down the river. “The old boat seems to know it's got a pretty young lady in charge.”

“Don't talk rubbish,” said the girl austere.

The new mate carefully adjusted his red necktie and smiled indulgently.

“Well, you're the prettiest cap'n I've ever sailed under,” he said.

“What do they call that red cap you've got on? Tam-o'-Shanter is it?”

“I don't know,” said the girl shortly.

“You mean you won't tell me,” said the other, with a look of anger in his soft dark eyes.

“Just as you like,” said she, and Lee, whistling softly, turned on his heel and began to busy himself with some small matter forward.

The rest of the day passed quietly, though there was a freedom in the new mate's manner which made the redoubtable skipper of the Osprey regret her change of crew, and to treat him with more civility than her proud spirit quite approved of. There was but little wind, and the barge merely crawled along as the captain and mate, with surreptitious glances, took each other's measure.

“This is the nicest trip I've ever had,” said Lee, as he came up from an unduly prolonged tea, with a strong-smelling cigar in his mouth. “I've brought your jacket up.”

“I don't want it, thank you,” said the girl.

“Better have it,” said Lee, holding it up for her.

“When I want my jacket I'll put it on myself,” said the girl.

“All right, no offence,” said the other airily. “What an obstinate little devil you are.”

“Have you got any drink down there?” inquired the girl, eyeing him sternly.

“Just a little drop o' whiskey, my dear, for the spasms,” said Lee facetiously. “Will you have a drop?”

“I won't have any drinking here,” said she sharply. “If you want to drink, wait till you get ashore.”

“YOU won't have any drinking!” said the

other, opening his eyes, and  
with a quiet chuckle he dived below and  
brought up a bottle and a glass.

“Here's wishing a better temper to you,  
my dear,” he said amiably, as he  
tossed off a glass. “Come, you'd better  
have a drop. It'll put a little  
colour in your cheeks.”

“Put it away now, there's a good fellow,”  
said the captain timidly, as  
she looked anxiously at the nearest sail,  
some two miles distant.

“It's the only friend I've got,” said Lee,  
sprawling gracefully on the  
hatches, and replenishing his glass.

“Look here. Are you on for a  
bargain?”

“What do you mean?” inquired the girl.

“Give me a kiss, little spitfire, and I won't  
take another drop

to-night,” said the new mate tenderly.  
“Come, I won't tell.”

“You may drink yourself to death before I'll do that,” said the girl, striving to speak calmly. “Don't talk that nonsense to me again.”

She stooped over as she spoke and made a sudden grab at the bottle, but the new mate was too quick for her, and, snatching it up jeeringly, dared her to come for it.

“Come on, come and fight for it,” said he; “hit me if you like, I don't mind; your little fist won't hurt.”

No answer being vouchsafed to this invitation he applied himself to his only friend again, while the girl, now thoroughly frightened, steered in silence.

“Better get the sidelights out,” said she at length.

“Plenty o' time,” said Lee.

“Take the helm, then, while I do it,” said the girl, biting her lips.

The fellow rose and came towards her, and, as she made way for him, threw his arm round her waist and tried to detain her. Her heart beating quickly, she walked forward, and, not without a hesitating glance at the drunken figure at the wheel, descended into the fo'c'sle for the lamps.

The next moment, with a gasping little cry, she sank down on a locker as the dark figure of a man rose and stood by her.

“Don't be frightened,” it said quietly.

“Jack?” said the girl.

“That's me,” said the figure. “You didn't expect to see me, did you? I thought perhaps you didn't know what was good for you, so I stowed myself away last night, and here I am.”

“Have you heard what that fellow has been saying to me?” demanded Miss Cringle, with a spice of the old temper leavening her voice once more.

“Every word,” said the mate cheerfully.

“Why didn't you come up and stand by me?” inquired the girl hotly.

The mate hung his head.

“Oh,” said the girl, and her tones were those of acute disappointment,  
“you're afraid.”



“I'm not,” said the mate scornfully.

“Why didn't you come up, then, instead of skulking down here?” inquired the girl.

The mate scratched the back of his neck and smiled, but weakly. “Well, I—I thought”—he began, and stopped.

“You thought”—prompted Miss Cringle coldly.

“I thought a little fright would do you good,” said the mate, speaking quickly, “and that it would make you appreciate me a little more when I did come.”

“Ahoy! MAGGIE! MAGGIE!” came the voice of the graceless varlet who was steering.

“I'll MAGGIE him,” said the mate,

grinding his teeth, "Why, what the—why you 're crying."

"I'm not," sobbed Miss Cringle scornfully. "I'm in a temper, that's all."

"I'll knock his head off," said the mate; "you stay down here."

"Mag-GIE!" came the voice again, "MAG—HULLO!"

"Were you calling me, my lad?" said the mate, with dangerous politeness, as he stepped aft. "Ain't you afraid of straining that sweet voice o' yours? Leave go o' that tiller."

The other let go, and the mate's fist took him heavily in the face and sent him sprawling on the deck. He rose with a scream of rage and rushed at his opponent, but the mate's temper,

which had suffered badly through his treatment of the last few days, was up, and he sent him heavily down again.

“There's a little dark dingy hole forward,” said the mate, after waiting some time for him to rise again, “just the place for you to go and think over your sins in. If I see you come out of it until we get to London, I'll hurt you. Now clear.”

The other cleared, and, carefully avoiding the girl, who was standing close by, disappeared below.

“You've hurt him,” said the girl, coming up to the mate and laying her hand on his arm. “What a horrid temper you've got.”

“It was him asking you to kiss him that upset me,” said the mate

apologetically.

“He put his arm round my waist,” said Miss Cringle, blushing.

“WHAT!” said the mate, stuttering, “put his—put his arm—round—your waist—like”—

His courage suddenly forsook him.

“Like what?” inquired the girl, with superb innocence.

“Like THAT,” said the mate manfully.

“That'll do,” said Miss Cringle softly, “that'll do. You're as bad as he is, only the worst of it is there is nobody here to prevent you.”



## UNDER THE LION'S PAW

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Main-Travelled Roads* by Hamlin Garland.

"Along this main-travelled road trailed an endless line of prairie schooners, coming into sight at the east, and passing out of sight over the swell to the west. We children used to wonder where they were going and why they went."

I

It was the last of autumn and first day of winter coming together. All day long the ploughmen on their prairie farms had moved to and fro in their wide level fields through the falling snow, which melted as it fell, wetting them to the skin--all day, notwithstanding the frequent squalls of snow, the dripping, desolate

clouds, and the muck of the  
furrows, black and tenacious as tar.

Under their dripping harness the horses  
swung to and fro silently, with  
that marvellous uncomplaining patience  
which marks the horse. All day  
the wild geese, honking wildly, as they  
sprawled sidewise down the wind,  
seemed to be fleeing from an enemy  
behind, and with neck outthrust and  
wings extended, sailed down the wind,  
soon lost to sight.

Yet the ploughman behind his plough,  
though the snow lay on his ragged  
great-coat, and the cold clinging mud  
rose on his heavy boots, fettering  
him like gyves, whistled in the very  
beard of the gale. As day passed,  
the snow, ceasing to melt, lay along the  
ploughed land, and lodged in  
the depth of the stubble, till on each slow  
round the last furrow stood

out black and shining as jet between the  
ploughed land and the gray  
stubble.

When night began to fall, and the geese,  
flying low, began to alight  
invisibly in the near corn-field, Stephen  
Council was still at work  
"finishing a land." He rode on his sulky  
plough when going with the  
wind, but walked when facing it. Sitting  
bent and cold but cheery under  
his slouch hat, he talked encouragingly to  
his four-in-hand.

"Come round there, boys!--Round agin!  
We got t' finish this land. Come  
in there, Dan! Stiddy, Kate,--stiddy!  
None o' y'r tantrums, Kittie. It's  
purty tuff, but got a be did. Tch! tch!  
Step along, Pete! Don't let  
Kate git y'r single-tree on the wheel.  
Once more!"

They seemed to know what he meant,  
and that this was the last round, for  
they worked with greater vigor than  
before.

"Once more, boys, an' then, sez I, oats an'  
a nice warm stall, an' sleep  
f'r all."

By the time the last furrow was turned on  
the land it was too dark to  
see the house, and the snow was  
changing to rain again. The tired and  
hungry man could see the light from the  
kitchen shining through the  
leafless hedge, and he lifted a great shout,  
"Supper f'r a half a  
dozen!"

It was nearly eight o'clock by the time he  
had finished his chores and  
started for supper. He was picking his  
way carefully through the mud,  
when the tall form of a man loomed up



before him with a premonitory cough.

"Waddy ye want?" was the rather startled question of the farmer.

"Well, ye see," began the stranger, in a deprecating tone, "we'd like t' git in f'r the night. We've tried every house f'r the last two miles, but they hadn't any room f'r us. My wife's jest about sick, 'n' the children are cold and hungry--"

"Oh, y' want 'o stay all night, eh?"

"Yes, sir; it 'ud be a great accom--"

"Waal, I don't make it a practice t' turn anybuddy way hungry, not on sech nights as this. Drive right in. We ain't got much, but sech as it is--"

But the stranger had disappeared. And soon his steaming, weary team, with drooping heads and swinging single-trees, moved past the well to the block beside the path. Council stood at the side of the "schooner" and helped the children out--two little half-sleeping children--and then a small woman with a babe in her arms.

"There ye go!" he shouted jovially, to the children. "Now we're all right! Run right along to the house there, an' tell Mam' Council you wants sumptin' t' eat. Right this way, Mis'--keep right off t' the right there. I'll go an' git a lantern. Come," he said to the dazed and silent group at his side.

"Mother," he shouted, as he neared the fragrant and warmly lighted kitchen, "here are some wayfarers an' folks who need sumptin' t' eat

an' a place t' snooze." He ended by pushing them all in.

Mrs. Council, a large, jolly, rather coarse-looking woman, took the children in her arms. "Come right in, you little rabbits. 'Most asleep, hey? Now here's a drink o' milk f'r each o' ye. I'll have s'm tea in a minute. Take off y'r things and set up t' the fire."

While she set the children to drinking milk, Council got out his lantern and went out to the barn to help the stranger about his team, where his loud, hearty voice could be heard as it came and went between the haymow and the stalls.

The woman came to light as a small, timid, and discouraged-looking woman, but still pretty, in a thin and sorrowful way.

"Land sakes! An' you've travelled all the way from Clear Lake t'-day in this mud! Waal! waal! No wonder you're all tired out. Don't wait fr the men, Mis'--" She hesitated, waiting for the name.

"Haskins."

"Mis' Haskins, set right up to the table an' take a good swig o' tea whilst I make y' s'm toast. It's green tea, an' it's good. I tell Council as I git older I don't seem to enjoy Young Hyson n'r Gunpowder. I want the reel green tea, jest as it comes off'n the vines. Seems t' have more heart in it, some way. Don't s'pose it has. Council says it's all in m' eye."

Going on in this easy way, she soon had the children filled with bread

and milk and the woman thoroughly at home, eating some toast and sweet-melon pickles, and sipping the tea.

"See the little rats!" she laughed at the children. "They're full as they can stick now, and they want to go to bed. Now, don't git up, Mis' Haskins; set right where you are an' let me look after 'em. I know all about young ones, though I'm all alone now. Jane went an' married last fall. But, as I tell Council, it's lucky we keep our health. Set right there, Mis' Haskins; I won't have you stir a finger."

It was an unmeasured pleasure to sit there in the warm, homely kitchen, the jovial chatter of the housewife driving out and holding at bay the growl of the impotent, cheated wind.

The little woman's eyes filled with tears

which fell down upon the  
sleeping baby in her arms. The world was  
not so desolate and cold and  
hopeless, after all.

"Now I hope Council won't stop out there  
and talk politics all night.  
He's the greatest man to talk politics an'  
read the Tribune--How old is  
it?"

She broke off and peered down at the  
face of the babe.

"Two months 'n' five days," said the  
mother, with a mother's exactness.

"Ye don't say! I want 'o know! The dear  
little pudzy-wudzy!" she went  
on, stirring it up in the neighborhood of  
the ribs with her fat  
forefinger.

"Pooty tough on 'oo to go gallivant'n'

'cross lots this way--"

"Yes, that's so; a man can't lift a mountain," said Council, entering the door. "Mother, this is Mr. Haskins, from Kansas. He's been eat up 'n' drove out by grasshoppers."

"Glad t' see yeh!--Pa, empty that wash-basin 'n' give him a chance t' wash."

Haskins was a tall man, with a thin, gloomy face. His hair was a reddish brown, like his coat, and seemed equally faded by the wind and sun, and his sallow face, though hard and set, was pathetic somehow. You would have felt that he had suffered much by the line of his mouth showing under his thin, yellow mustache.

"Hadn't Ike got home yet, Sairy?"

"Hadn't seen 'im."

"W-a-a-l, set right up, Mr. Haskins; wade right into what we've got; 'taint much, but we manage to live on it-- she gits fat on it," laughed Council, pointing his thumb at his wife.

After supper, while the women put the children to bed, Haskins and Council talked on, seated near the huge cooking-stove, the steam rising from their wet clothing. In the Western fashion Council told as much of his own life as he drew from his guest. He asked but few questions, but by and by the story of Haskins' struggles and defeat came out. The story was a terrible one, but he told it quietly, seated with his elbows on his knees, gazing most of the time at the hearth.

"I didn't like the looks of the country,



anyhow," Haskins said, partly rising and glancing at his wife. "I was ust t' northern Ingyannie, where we have lots o' timber 'n' lots o' rain, 'n' I didn't like the looks o' that dry prairie. What galled me the worst was goin' s' far away acrosst so much fine land layin' all through here vacant."

"And the 'hoppers eat ye four years, hand runnin', did they?"

"Eat! They wiped us out. They chewed everything that was green. They jest set around waitin' fr us to die t' eat us, too. My God! I ust t' dream of 'em sittin' 'round on the bedpost, six feet long, workin' their jaws. They eet the fork-handles. They got worse 'n' worse till they jest rolled on one another, piled up like snow in winter. Well, it ain't no use. If I was t' talk all winter I couldn't

tell nawthin'. But all the  
while I couldn't help thinkin' of all that  
land back here that nobuddy  
was usin' that I ought 'o had 'stead o' bein'  
out there in that cussed  
country."

"Waal, why didn't ye stop an' settle  
here?" asked Ike, who had come in  
and was eating his supper.

"Fer the simple reason that you fellers  
wantid ten 'r fifteen dollars an  
acre fer the bare land, and I hadn't no  
money fer that kind o' thing."

"Yes, I do my own work," Mrs. Council  
was heard to say in the pause  
which followed. "I'm a gettin' purty  
heavy t' be on m' laigs all day,  
but we can't afford t' hire, so I keep  
rackin' around somehow, like a  
foundered horse. S' lame--I tell Council  
he can't tell how lame I am,

fr I'm jest as lame in one laig as t'other."  
And the good soul laughed  
at the joke on herself as she took a  
handful of flour and dusted the  
biscuit-board to keep the dough from  
sticking.

"Well, I hain't never been very strong,"  
said Mrs. Haskins. "Our folks  
was Canadians an' small-boned, and then  
since my last child I hain't got  
up again fairly. I don't like t' complain.  
Tim has about all he can bear  
now--but they was days this week when I  
jest wanted to lay right down  
an' die."

"Waal, now, I'll tell ye," said Council,  
from his side of the stove,  
silencing everybody with his good-  
natured roar, "I'd go down and see  
Butler, anyway, if I was you. I guess he'd  
let you have his place purty  
cheap; the farm's all run down. He's ben

anxious t' let t' somebuddy  
next year. It 'ud be a good chance fer you.  
Anyhow, you go to bed and  
sleep like a babe. I've got some  
ploughing t' do, anyhow, an' we'll see  
if somethin' can't be done about your  
case. Ike, you go out an' see if  
the horses is all right, an' I'll show the  
folks t' bed."

When the tired husband and wife were  
lying under the generous quilts of  
the spare bed, Haskins listened a moment  
to the wind in the eaves, and  
then said, with a slow and solemn tone,

"There are people in this world who are  
good enough t' be angels, an'  
only haff t' die to be angels."

## II

Jim Butler was one of those men called  
in the West "land poor." Early in

the history of Rock River he had come into the town and started in the grocery business in a small way, occupying a small building in a mean part of the town. At this period of his life he earned all he got, and was up early and late sorting beans, working over butter, and carting his goods to and from the station. But a change came over him at the end of the second year, when he sold a lot of land for four times what he paid for it. From that time forward he believed in land speculation as the surest way of getting rich. Every cent he could save or spare from his trade he put into land at forced sale, or mortgages on land, which were "just as good as the wheat," he was accustomed to say.

Farm after farm fell into his hands, until he was recognized as one of the leading landowners of the county. His

mortgages were scattered all  
over Cedar County, and as they slowly  
but surely fell in he sought  
usually to retain the former owner as  
tenant.

He was not ready to foreclose; indeed, he  
had the name of being one of  
the "easiest" men in the town. He let the  
debtor off again and again,  
extending the time whenever possible.

"I don't want y'r land," he said. "All I'm  
after is the int'rest on my  
money--that's all. Now, if y' want 'o stay  
on the farm, why, I'll give  
y' a good chance. I can't have the land  
layin' vacant." And in many  
cases the owner remained as tenant.

In the meantime he had sold his store; he  
couldn't spend time in it; he  
was mainly occupied now with sitting  
around town on rainy days smoking

and "gassin' with the boys," or in riding to and from his farms. In fishing-time he fished a good deal. Doc Grimes, Ben Ashley, and Cal Cheatham were his cronies on these fishing excursions or hunting trips in the time of chickens or partridges. In winter they went to Northern Wisconsin to shoot deer.

In spite of all these signs of easy life Butler persisted in saying he "hadn't enough money to pay taxes on his land," and was careful to convey the impression that he was poor in spite of his twenty farms. At one time he was said to be worth fifty thousand dollars, but land had been a little slow of sale of late, so that he was not worth so much.

A fine farm, known as the Higley place, had fallen into his hands in the usual way the previous year, and he had

not been able to find a tenant  
for it. Poor Higley, after working himself  
nearly to death on it in the  
attempt to lift the mortgage, had gone off  
to Dakota, leaving the farm  
and his curse to Butler.

This was the farm which Council advised  
Haskins to apply for; and the  
next day Council hitched up his team and  
drove down to see Butler.

"You jest let me do the talkin'," he said.  
"We'll find him wearin' out  
his pants on some salt barrel somew'ers;  
and if he thought you wanted a  
place he'd sock it to you hot and heavy.  
You jest keep quiet; I'll fix  
'im."

Butler was seated in Ben Ashley's store  
telling fish yarns when Council  
sauntered in casually.



"Hello, But; lyin' agin, hey?"

"Hello, Steve! how goes it?"

"Oh, so-so. Too dang much rain these days. I thought it was goin' t' freeze up fr good last night. Tight squeak if I get m' ploughin' done. How's farmin' with you these days?"

"Bad. Ploughin' ain't half done."

"It 'ud be a religious idee fr you t' go out an' take a hand y'rself."

"I don't haff to," said Butler, with a wink.

"Got anybody on the Higley place?"

"No. Know of anybody?"

"Waal, no; not eggsackly. I've got a relation back t' Michigan who's ben hot an' cold on the idee o' comin'

West fr some time. Might come if he could get a good lay-out. What do you talk on the farm?"

"Well, I d' know. I'll rent it on shares or I'll rent it money rent."

"Waal, how much money, say?"

"Well, say ten per cent, on the price--two-fifty."

"Waal, that ain't bad. Wait on 'im till 'e thrashes?"

Haskins listened eagerly to his important question, but Council was coolly eating a dried apple which he had speared out of a barrel with his knife. Butler studied him carefully.

"Well, knocks me out of twenty-five dollars interest."

"My relation'll need all he's got t' git his crops in," said Council, in the same, indifferent way.

"Well, all right; say wait," concluded Butler.

"All right; this is the man. Haskins, this is Mr. Butler--no relation to Ben--the hardest-working man in Cedar County."

On the way home Haskins said: "I ain't much better off. I'd like that farm; it's a good farm, but it's all run down, an' so 'm I. I could make a good farm of it if I had half a show. But I can't stock it n'r seed it."

"Waal, now, don't you worry," roared Council in his ear. "We'll pull y' through somehow till next harvest. He's agreed t' hire it ploughed, an'

you can earn a hundred dollars ploughin'  
an' y' c'n git the seed o' me,  
an' pay me back when y' can."

Haskins was silent with emotion, but at  
last he said, "I ain't got  
nothin' t' live on."

"Now, don't you worry 'bout that. You  
jest make your headquarters at ol'  
Steve Council's. Mother'll take a pile o'  
comfort in havin' y'r wife an'  
children 'round. Y' see, Jane's married off  
lately, an' Ike's away a  
good 'eal, so we'll be darn glad t' have y'  
stop with us this winter.  
Nex' spring we'll see if y' can't git a start  
agin." And he chirruped to  
the team, which sprang forward with the  
rumbling, clattering wagon.

"Say, looky here, Council, you can't do  
this. I never saw--" shouted  
Haskins in his neighbor's ear.

Council moved about uneasily in his seat and stopped his stammering gratitude by saying: "Hold on, now; don't make such a fuss over a little thing. When I see a man down, an' things all on top of 'm, I jest like t' kick 'em off an' help 'm up. That's the kind of religion I got, an' it's about the only kind."

They rode the rest of the way home in silence. And when the red light of the lamp shone out into the darkness of the cold and windy night, and he thought of this refuge for his children and wife, Haskins could have put his arm around the neck of his burly companion and squeezed him like a lover. But he contented himself with saying, "Steve Council, you'll git y'r pay fr this some day."

"Don't want any pay. My religion ain't

run on such business principles."

The wind was growing colder, and the ground was covered with a white frost, as they turned into the gate of the Council farm, and the children came rushing out, shouting, "Papa's come!" They hardly looked like the same children who had sat at the table the night before. Their torpidity, under the influence of sunshine and Mother Council, had given way to a sort of spasmodic cheerfulness, as insects in winter revive when laid on the hearth.

### III

Haskins worked like a fiend, and his wife, like the heroic woman that she was, bore also uncomplainingly the most terrible burdens. They rose early and toiled without intermission till the darkness fell on the

plain, then tumbled into bed, every bone  
and muscle aching with fatigue,  
to rise with the sun next morning to the  
same round of the same ferocity  
of labor.

The eldest boy drove a team all through  
the spring, ploughing and  
seeding, milked the cows, and did chores  
innumerable, in most ways  
taking the place of a man.

An infinitely pathetic but common  
figure--this boy on the American farm,  
where there is no law against child labor.  
To see him in his coarse  
clothing, his huge boots, and his ragged  
cap, as he staggered with a  
pail of water from the well, or trudged in  
the cold and cheerless dawn  
out into the frosty field behind his team,  
gave the city-bred visitor a  
sharp pang of sympathetic pain. Yet  
Haskins loved his boy, and would

have saved him from this if he could, but he could not.

By June the first year the result of such Herculean toil began to show on the farm. The yard was cleaned up and sown to grass, the garden ploughed and planted, and the house mended.

Council had given them four of his cows.

"Take 'em an' run 'em on shares. I don't want 'o milk s' many. Ike's away s' much now, Sat'd'ys an' Sund'ys, I can't stand the bother anyhow."

Other men, seeing the confidence of Council in the newcomer, had sold him tools on time; and as he was really an able farmer, he soon had round him many evidences of his care and thrift. At the advice of



Council he had taken the farm for three years, with the privilege of re-renting or buying at the end of the term.

"It's a good bargain, an' y' want 'o nail it," said Council. "If you have any kind ov a crop, you c'n pay y'r debts, an' keep seed an' bread."

The new hope which now sprang up in the heart of Haskins and his wife grew almost as a pain by the time the wide field of wheat began to wave and rustle and swirl in the winds of July. Day after day he would snatch a few moments after supper to go and look at it.

"Have ye seen the wheat t'-day, Nettie?" he asked one night as he rose from supper.

"No, Tim, I ain't had time."

"Well, take time now. Le's go look at it."

She threw an old hat on her head--  
Tommy's hat--and looking almost pretty  
in her thin, sad way, went out with her  
husband to the hedge.

"Ain't it grand, Nettie? Just look at it."

It was grand. Level, russet here and there,  
heavy-headed, wide as a  
lake, and full of multitudinous whispers  
and gleams of wealth, it  
stretched away before the gazers like the  
fabled field of the cloth of  
gold.

"Oh, I think--I hope we'll have a good  
crop, Tim; and oh, how good the  
people have been to us!"

"Yes; I don't know where we'd be t'-day if

it hadn't ben fr Council and  
his wife."

"They're the best people in the world,"  
said the little woman, with a  
great sob of gratitude.

"We'll be in the field on Monday, sure,"  
said Haskins, gripping the rail  
on the fence as if already at the work of  
the harvest.

The harvest came, bounteous, glorious,  
but the winds came and blew it  
into tangles, and the rain matted it here  
and there close to the ground,  
increasing the work of gathering it  
threefold.

Oh, how they toiled in those glorious  
days! Clothing dripping with  
sweat, arms aching, filled with briers,  
fingers raw and bleeding, backs  
broken with the weight of heavy bundles,

Haskins and his man toiled on.  
Tommy drove the harvester, while his  
father and a hired man bound on the  
machine. In this way they cut ten acres  
every day, and almost every  
night after supper, when the hand went to  
bed, Haskins returned to the  
field shocking the bound grain in the  
light of the moon. Many a night he  
worked till his anxious wife came out at  
ten o'clock to call him in to  
rest and lunch.

At the same time she cooked for the men,  
took care of the children,  
washed and ironed, milked the cows at  
night, made the butter, and  
sometimes fed the horses and watered  
them while her husband kept at the  
shocking.

No slave in the Roman galleys could  
have toiled so frightfully and  
lived, for this man thought himself a free

man, and that he was working  
for his wife and babes.

When he sank into his bed with a deep  
groan of relief, too tired to  
change his grimy, dripping clothing, he  
felt that he was getting nearer  
and nearer to a home of his own, and  
pushing the wolf of want a little  
farther from his door.

There is no despair so deep as the despair  
of a homeless man or woman.  
To roam the roads of the country or the  
streets of the city, to feel  
there is no rood of ground on which the  
feet can rest, to halt weary and  
hungry outside lighted windows and hear  
laughter and song within,--these  
are the hungers and rebellions that drive  
men to crime and women to  
shame.

It was the memory of this homelessness,

and the fear of its coming again, that spurred Timothy Haskins and Nettie, his wife, to such ferocious labor during that first year.

#### IV

"M, yes; 'm, yes; first-rate," said Butler, as his eye took in the neat garden, the pig-pen, and the well-filled barnyard. "You're gitt'n' quite a stock around yeh. Done well, eh?"

Haskins was showing Butler around the place. He had not seen it for a year, having spent the year in Washington and Boston with Ashley, his brother-in-law, who had been elected to Congress.

"Yes, I've laid out a good deal of money durin' the last three years. I've paid out three hundred dollars fr fencin'."

"Um--h'm! I see, I see," said Butler,  
while Haskins went on:

"The kitchen there cost two hundred; the  
barn ain't cost much in money,  
but I've put a lot o' time on it. I've dug a  
new well, and I--"

"Yes, yes, I see. You've done well. Stock  
worth a thousand dollars,"  
said Butler, picking his teeth with a  
straw.

"About that," said Haskins, modestly.  
"We begin to feel's if we was  
gitt'n' a home f'r ourselves; but we've  
worked hard. I tell you we begin  
to feel it, Mr. Butler, and we're goin' t'  
begin to ease up purty soon.  
We've been kind o' plannin' a trip back t'  
her folks after the fall  
ploughin's done."

"Eggs-actly!" said Butler, who was evidently thinking of something else. "I suppose you've kind o' calc'lated on stayin' here three years more?"

"Well, yes. Fact is, I think I c'n buy the farm this fall, if you'll give me a reasonable show."

"Um--m! What do you call a reasonable show?"

"Well, say a quarter down and three years' time."

Butler looked at the huge stacks of wheat, which filled the yard, over which the chickens were fluttering and crawling, catching grasshoppers, and out of which the crickets were singing innumably. He smiled in a peculiar way as he said, "Oh, I won't be hard on yeh. But what did you expect to pay fr the place?"



"Why, about what you offered it for before, two thousand five hundred, or possibly three thousand dollars," he added quickly, as he saw the owner shake his head.

"This farm is worth five thousand and five hundred dollars," said Butler, in a careless and decided voice.

"What!" almost shrieked the astounded Haskins. "What's that? Five thousand? Why, that's double what you offered it for three years ago."

"Of course, and it's worth it. It was all run down then; now it's in good shape. You've laid out fifteen hundred dollars in improvements, according to your own story."

"But you had nothin' t' do about that. It's my work an' my money."

"You bet it was; but it's my land."

"But what's to pay me for all my--"

"Ain't you had the use of 'em?" replied Butler, smiling calmly into his face.

Haskins was like a man struck on the head with a sandbag; he couldn't think; he stammered as he tried to say: "But--I never'd git the use--You'd rob me! More'n that: you agreed--you promised that I could buy or rent at the end of three years at--"

"That's all right. But I didn't say I'd let you carry off the improvements, nor that I'd go on renting the farm at two-fifty. The land is doubled in value, it don't matter how; it don't enter into the question; an' now you can pay me five

hundred dollars a year rent, or  
take it on your own terms at fifty-five  
hundred, or--git out."

He was turning away when Haskins, the  
sweat pouring from his face,  
fronted him, saying again:

"But you've done nothing to make it so.  
You hain't added a cent. I put  
it all there myself, expectin' to buy. I  
worked an' sweat to improve it.  
I was workin' for myself an' babes--"

"Well, why didn't you buy when I offered  
to sell? What y' kickin'  
about?"

"I'm kickin' about payin' you twice f'r my  
own things,--my own fences,  
my own kitchen, my own garden."

Butler laughed. "You're too green t' eat,  
young feller. Your

improvements! The law will sing another tune."

"But I trusted your word."

"Never trust anybody, my friend. Besides, I didn't promise not to do this thing. Why, man, don't look at me like that. Don't take me for a thief. It's the law. The reg'lar thing. Everybody does it."

"I don't care if they do. It's stealin' jest the same. You take three thousand dollars of my money--the work o' my hands and my wife's." He broke down at this point. He was not a strong man mentally. He could face hardship, ceaseless toil, but he could not face the cold and sneering face of Butler.

"But I don't take it," said Butler, coolly.  
"All you've got to do is to

go on jest as you've been a-doin', or give me a thousand dollars down, and a mortgage at ten per cent on the rest."

Haskins sat down blindly on a bundle of oats near by, and with staring eyes and drooping head went over the situation. He was under the lion's paw. He felt a horrible numbness in his heart and limbs. He was hid in a mist, and there was no path out.

Butler walked about, looking at the huge stacks of grain, and pulling now and again a few handfuls out, shelling the heads in his hands and blowing the chaff away. He hummed a little tune as he did so. He had an accommodating air of waiting.

Haskins was in the midst of the terrible toil of the last year. He was walking again in the rain and the mud

behind his plough; he felt the dust and dirt of the threshing. The ferocious husking-time, with its cutting wind and biting, clinging snows, lay hard upon him. Then he thought of his wife, how she had cheerfully cooked and baked, without holiday and without rest.

"Well, what do you think of it?" inquired the cool, mocking, insinuating voice of Butler.

"I think you're a thief and a liar!" shouted Haskins, leaping up. "A black-hearted hound!" Butler's smile maddened him; with a sudden leap he caught a fork in his hands, and whirled it in the air. "You'll never rob another man, damn ye!" he grated through his teeth, a look of pitiless ferocity in his accusing eyes.

Butler shrank and quivered, expecting the

blow; stood, held hypnotized  
by the eyes of the man he had a moment  
before despised--a man  
transformed into an avenging demon. But  
in the deadly hush between the  
lift of the weapon and its fall there came  
a gush of faint, childish  
laughter and then across the range of his  
vision, far away and dim, he  
saw the sun-bright head of his baby girl,  
as, with the pretty, tottering  
run of a two-year-old, she moved across  
the grass of the dooryard. His  
hands relaxed: the fork fell to the ground;  
his head lowered.

"Make out y'r deed an' mor'gage, an' git  
off'n my land, an' don't ye  
never cross my line agin; if y' do, I'll kill  
ye."

Butler backed away from the man in wild  
haste, and climbing into his  
buggy with trembling limbs drove off

down the road, leaving Haskins  
seated dumbly on the sunny pile of  
sheaves, his head sunk into his  
hands.





## SHALL HE MARRY HER?

By Anna Katherine Green.

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Eleven Possible Cases*, by Various

### Chapter I.

When I met Taylor at the club the other night, he looked so cheerful I scarcely knew him.

"What is it?" cried I, advancing with outstretched hand.

"I am going to be married," was his gay reply. "This is my last night at the club."

I was glad, and showed it. Taylor is a man for whom domestic life is a necessity. He has never been at home with us, though we all liked him and he, in his way, liked us.

"And who is the fortunate lady?" I inquired; for I had been out of town for some time and had not as yet been made acquainted with the latest society news.

"My intended bride is Mrs. Walworth, the young widow----"

He must have seen a change take place in my expression, for he stopped.

"You know her, of course," he added, after a short study of my face.

I had by this time regained my self-possession.

"Of course," I repeated, "and I have always thought her one of the most attractive women in town. Another shake upon it, old man?"

But my heart was heavy and my mind

perplexed, notwithstanding the forced cordiality of my tones, and I took an early opportunity to withdraw by myself and think over the situation.

Mrs. Walworth! She was a pretty woman, and what was more, she was, to all appearance, a woman whose winning manners bespoke a kindly heart. "Just the person," I contemplated, "whom I would pick out for the helpmate of my somewhat exacting friend, if----" I paused on that if. It was a formidable one, and grew none the smaller or less important under my broodings. Indeed, it seemed to dilate until it assumed gigantic proportions, worrying me and weighing so heavily upon my conscience that I at last rose from the newspaper at which I had been hopelessly staring, and looking up Taylor again, asked him how soon he expected to become a Benedict.

His answer startled me. "In a week," he replied, "and if I have not asked you to the ceremony, it is because Helen is not in a position to----"

I supposed he finished the sentence, but I did not hear him. If the marriage was so near, of course it would be folly on my part to attempt to hinder it. I drew off for the second time.

But I could not remain easy. Taylor is a good fellow, and it would be a shame to allow him to marry a woman with whom he could never be happy. He would feel any such disappointment so keenly, so much more keenly than most men. A lack of principle or even of sensibility on her part, would make him miserable. Anticipating heaven, it would not take a hell

to make him wretched, a purgatory would do it. Was I right, then, in letting him proceed in his intentions regarding Mrs. Walworth, when she possibly was the woman who----I paused and tried to call up her countenance before me. It was a sweet one and possibly a true one. I might have trusted her for myself, but I do not look for perfection and Taylor does, and will certainly go to the bad if he is deceived in his expectations. But in a week! It is too late for interference--only it is never too late till the knot is tied. As I thought of this, I decided impulsively, and perhaps you may say unwisely, to give him a hint of his danger, and I did it in this wise.

"Taylor," said I, when I had him safely in my own rooms, "I am going to tell you a bit of personal history, curious enough I think to interest

you even upon the eve of your marriage.  
I do not know when I shall see  
you again, and I should like you to know  
how a lawyer and a man of the  
world can sometimes be taken in."

He nodded, accepting the situation good-humoredly, though I saw by the abstraction with which he gazed into the fire, that I should have to be very interesting to lure him from the thoughts that engrossed him. As I meant to be very interesting, this did not greatly concern me.

"One morning last spring," I began, "I received in my morning mail a letter, the delicate penmanship of which at once attracted my attention and awakened my curiosity. Turning to the signature, I read the name of a young lady friend of mine, and, somewhat startled at the thought that this was the first time I had ever seen the

handwriting of one I knew so  
well, I perused the letter with an interest  
that presently became  
painful as I realized the tenor of its  
contents. I will not quote the  
letter, though I could, but confine myself  
to saying that after a modest  
recognition of my friendship for her--  
quite a fatherly friendship, I  
assure you, as she is only eighteen and I,  
as you know, am well on  
toward fifty--she proceeded to ask, in an  
humble and confiding spirit,  
for the loan--do not start--of fifty dollars.  
Such a request coming from  
a young girl, well connected, and with  
every visible sign of being  
generously provided for by her father,  
was certainly startling to an old  
bachelor of settled ways and strict  
notions, but remembering her youth  
and the childish innocence of her manner,  
I turned over the page and  
read as her reason for proffering such a

request, that her heart was set  
upon aiding a certain poor family that  
stood in immediate need of food,  
clothes, and medicines, but that she could  
not do what she wished  
because she had already spent all the  
money allowed her by her father  
for such purposes, and dared not go to  
him for more, as she had once  
before offended him by doing this, and  
feared if she repeated her fault  
he would carry out the threat he had then  
made of stopping her allowance  
altogether. But the family was a  
deserving one and she could not see any  
member of it starve, so she came to me,  
of whose goodness she was  
assured, convinced I would understand  
her perplexity and excuse her--and  
so forth and so forth, in language quite  
childlike and entreating,  
which, if it did not satisfy my ideas of  
propriety, at least touched my  
heart, and made any action which I could



take in the matter extremely  
difficult.

"To refuse her request would be at once  
to mortify and aggrieve her; to  
accede to it and give her the fifty dollars  
she asked--a sum, by the  
way, I could not well spare--would be to  
encourage an action, easily  
pardoned once, but which if repeated  
would lead to unpleasant  
complications, to say the least. The third  
course of informing her  
father of what she needed I did not even  
consider, for I knew him well  
enough to be sure that nothing but pain to  
her would be the result. I  
therefore compromised the affair by  
enclosing the money in a letter in  
which I told her that I comprehended her  
difficulty and sent with  
pleasure the amount she needed, but that  
as a friend I must add that  
while in the present instance she had run

no risk of being misunderstood or unkindly censured, that such a request made to another man and under other circumstances might provoke a surprise capable of leading to the most unpleasant consequences, and advised her if she ever again found herself in such a strait to appeal directly to her father, or else to deny herself a charity which she was in no position to bestow.

"This letter I undertook to deliver myself, for one of the curious points of her communication had been the entreaty that I would not delay the help she needed by trusting the money to any hand but my own, but would bring it to a certain hotel down town, and place it at the beginning of the book of Isaiah in the large Bible I would find lying on a side table in the small parlor off the main one. She would seek it

there before the morning was over, and so, without the intervention of a third party, acquire the means she desired for helping a poor and deserving family.

"I knew the hotel she mentioned, and I remembered the room, but I did not remember the Bible. However, it was sure to be in the place she indicated, and though I was not in much sympathy with my errand, I respected her whim, and carried the letter down town. I had reached Main Street, and was in sight of the hotel designated, when suddenly, on an opposite corner of the street, I saw the young girl herself. She looked as fresh as the morning, and smiled so gayly I felt somewhat repaid for the annoyance she had caused me; and, gratified that I could cut matters short by putting the letter directly in her hand, I crossed the street

to her side. As soon as we were face to face, I said:

"How fortunate I am to meet you. Here is the amount you need sealed up in this letter. You see I had it all ready."

"The face she lifted to mine wore so blank a look that I paused astonished.

"What do you mean?" she asked, her eyes looking straight into mine with such innocence in their clear blue depths I was at once convinced she knew nothing of the matter with which my thoughts were busy. 'I am very glad to see you, but I do not in the least understand what you mean by the amount I need,' and she glanced at the letter I held out with an air of distrust mingled with curiosity.

"I could not explain myself. If she had

been made the victim of a conspiracy to procure money from me, it would not help to preserve that sweet innocence of hers to know it. So, with a laugh, I put the letter in my pocket, saying:

"You cut me short in my efforts to do a charitable action. I heard, no matter how, that you were interested just now in a destitute family, and took this way of assisting you in their behalf."

"Her blue eyes opened wider. 'The poor are always with us,' she replied; 'but I know of no special family just now that requires any such help as you intimate. If I did, papa would give me what assistance I needed.'"

"I was greatly pleased to hear her say this, for I am very fond of my young friend, but I was deeply indignant

also against the unknown person  
who had taken advantage of my regard  
for this young girl to force money  
from me. I, therefore, did not linger at her  
side, but, after due  
apologies, hastened immediately here,  
where there is a man employed who,  
to my knowledge, had once been a  
trusted member of the police.

"Telling him no more of the story than  
was necessary to insure his  
co-operation in the plan I had formed to  
discover the author of this  
fraud, I extracted the bank-notes from the  
letter I had written, and put  
in their place stiff pieces of manilla  
paper. Taking the envelope so  
filled to the hotel already alluded to, I  
placed it at the opening  
chapters of Isaiah in the Bible as  
described. There was no one in either  
of the rooms when I went in, and I  
encountered only a bell-boy as I came

out; but at the door I ran against a young man whom I strictly forbore to recognize, but whom I knew to be my improvised detective coming to take his stand in some place where he could watch the parlor, and note who went into it.

"At noon I returned to the hotel, passed immediately to the small parlor, and looked into the Bible. The letter was gone. Coming out of the room, I was at once joined by my detective.

"Has the letter been taken?" he eagerly inquired.

"I nodded.

"His brows wrinkled and he looked both troubled and perplexed.

"I don't understand it," he remarked, 'I've

seen every one who has gone into that room since you left it, but I do not know now any more than before who took the letter. You see,' he continued, as I looked at him sharply, 'I had to remain out here. If I had gone even into the large room the Bible would not have been disturbed nor the letter either, so in the hope of knowing the rogue at sight, I strolled about this hall and kept my eye constantly on that door, but----'

"He looked embarrassed and stopped.

"You say the letter is gone?' he suggested, after a moment.

"Yes,' I returned.

"He shook his head. 'Nobody went into that room or came out of it,' he went on, 'whom you would have wished



me to follow. I should have thought myself losing time if I had taken one step after any one of them.'

"But who did go into that room?" I urged, impatient at his perplexity.

"Only three persons this morning,' he returned. 'You know them all.'  
And he mentioned first Mrs. Couldock."

Taylor, who was lending me the superficial attention of a pre-occupied man, smiled frankly at the utterance of this name. "Of course she had nothing to do with such a debasing piece of business," he observed.

"Of course not," I repeated. "Nor does it seem likely that Miss Dawes could have been concerned in it either. Yet my detective told me that she was the next person who went into the parlor."

"I do not know Miss Dawes so well," remarked Taylor carelessly.

"But I do," said I, "and I would as soon suspect my sister of a dishonorable act as this noble, self-sacrificing woman."

"The third person?" suggested Taylor.

I got up and crossed the floor. When my back was to him I said quietly:

"Was Mrs. Walworth."

The silence that followed was very painful. I did not dare to break it, and he doubtless found himself unable to do so. It must have been five minutes before either of us spoke, then he suddenly cried:

"Where is that detective, as you call him?"

I want to see him."

"Let me see him for you," said I. "I should hardly wish Sudley, discreet as I consider him, to know you had any interest in this affair."

Taylor rose and came to where I stood.

"You believe," said he, "that she, the woman I am about to marry, is the one who wrote you that infamous letter?"

I faced him quite frankly. "I do not feel ready to acknowledge that," I replied. "One of those three women took my letter from out the Bible where I placed it; which of them wrote the lines that provoked it, I do not dare conjecture. You say it was not Mrs. Couldock. I say it was not Miss Dawes, but----"

He broke in upon me impetuously.

"Have you the letter?" he asked.

I had and showed it to him.

"It is not Helen's handwriting," he said.

"Nor is it that of Mrs. Couldock or Miss Dawes."

He looked at me for a moment in a wild sort of way.

"You think she got some one to write it for her?" he cried. "Helen! my Helen! But it is not so; it cannot be so. Why, Huntley, to have sent such a letter as that over the name of an innocent young girl, who but for the happy chance of your meeting her as you did, might never have had the opportunity of righting herself in your estimation, argues a cold and calculating selfishness closely

allied to depravity. And my Helen is an angel--or so I have always thought her."

The depth to which his voice sank in the last sentence showed that for all his seeming confidence he was not without his doubts. I began to feel very uncomfortable, and not knowing what consolation to offer, I ventured upon the suggestion that he should see Mrs. Walworth and frankly ask her whether she had been to the hotel on Main Street on such a day, and if so, if she had seen a letter addressed to Miss N. lying on the table of the small parlor. His answer showed how much his confidence in her had been shaken.

"A woman who, for the sake of paying some unworthy debt, or of gratifying some whim of feminine vanity, could make use of a young

girl's signature to obtain money, would not hesitate at any denial. She would not even blanch at my questions."

He was right.

"I must be convinced in some other way," he went on. "Mrs. Couldock or Miss Dawes do not either of them possess any more truthful or ingenuous countenance than she does, and though it seems madness to suspect such women----"

"Wait," I broke in, "let us be sure of all the facts before we go on. You lie down here and close your eyes; now pull the rug up so. I will have Sudley in and question him. If you do not turn toward the light he will not know who you are."

Taylor followed my suggestion and in a few moments Sudley stood before

me. I opened upon him quite carelessly.

"Sudley," said I, throwing down the newspaper I had been ostensibly reading. "You remember that little business you did for me in Main Street last month? Something I've been reading made me think of it again."

"Yes, sir."

"Have you never had a conviction yourself as to which of the three ladies you saw go into the parlor took the letter I left hid in the Bible?"

"No, sir. You see, I could not. All of them are well known in society here and all of them belong to the most respectable families. I wouldn't dare to choose between them, sir."

"Certainly not," I rejoined, "unless you had some good reason for doing so, such as having been able to account for the visits of two of the ladies to the hotel and not of the third."

"They all had good pretexts for being there. Mrs. Couldock gave her card to the boy before going into the parlor and left as soon as he returned with word that the lady she called to see was not in. Miss Dawes gave no card but asked for a Miss Terhune, I think, and did not remain a moment after she was informed that that lady had left the hotel."

"And Mrs. Walworth?"

"She came in from the street adjusting her veil, and upon looking around for a mirror, was directed to the parlor, into which she at once stepped. She remained there but a



moment and when she came out passed directly into the street."

These words disconcerted me; the mirror was just over the table in the small room, but I managed to remark nonchalantly:

"Could you not tell whether any of these ladies opened the Bible?"

"Not without seeming intrusive."

I sighed and dismissed the man. When he was gone I approached Taylor.

"He can give us no assistance," I cried.

My friend was already on his feet, looking very miserable.

"I know of but one thing to do," he remarked. "To-morrow I shall call upon Mrs. Couldock and Miss Dawes

and entreat them to tell me if for any reason they undertook to deliver a letter mysteriously left in the Bible of the ---- Hotel one day last month. They may have been deputed to do so, and be quite willing to acknowledge it."

"And Mrs. Walworth? Will you not ask her the same question?"

He shook his head and turned away.

"Very well," said I to myself, "then I will."

## Chapter II.

Accordingly, the next day I called upon Mrs. Walworth. She lived, as I already knew, in a small and unpretentious house just on the verge of our most fashionable quarter. But there was great taste displayed in the

furnishing of that house, and I was not at all surprised to see evidences here and there of a poverty which the general effect tended to make you forget. I was fortunate enough to find her in, and still more fortunate to find her alone, but my courage fell as I confronted her, for she has one of those appealing faces that equally interest and baffle you, making you feel that unless your errand be one of peace and comfort, you had better not confront so tremulous a mouth and so tender a hazel eye. But I had steeled myself against too much sympathy when I entered her presence, so barely pausing to make my most ingratiating bow, I took her by the hand, and gently forcing her to stand for a moment where the light from the one window fell full upon her face, I said:

"You must pardon my intrusion upon you at a time when you are naturally busy, but there is something you can do for me that will rid me of a great anxiety. You remember being in ---- Hotel one morning last month?"

She was looking quietly up at me, her lips parted, her eyes smiling and expectant, but at the mention of that hotel I thought--and yet I may have been mistaken--that a slight change took place in her expression, if it was only that the glance grew more gentle and the smile more marked.

But her voice when she answered was the same as that with which she had uttered her greeting.

"I do not remember," she replied, "yet I may have been there; I go to so many places. Why do you ask?" she

inquired.

"Because if you were there on that morning--and I have been told you were--you may be able to solve a question that is greatly perplexing me."

Still the same gentle inquiring look on her face, only now there was a little furrow of wonder or interest between the eyes.

"I had business in that hotel on that morning," I continued. "I had left a letter for a young friend of mine in the Bible that lies on the small table of the inner parlor, and as she never received it, I have been driven into making all kinds of inquiries, in hope of finding some explanation of the fact. As you were there at the time, you may have seen something that would aid me. Is it

not possible, Mrs. Walworth?"

Her smile, which had faded, reappeared on the lips which Taylor so much admired, a little pout became visible and she looked quite enchanting.

"I do not even remember being at that hotel at all," she protested. "Did Mr. Taylor say I was there?" she inquired, with just that added look of exquisite naïveté which the utterance of a lover's name should call up on the face of a prospective bride.

"No," I answered gravely, "Mr. Taylor, unhappily, was not with you that morning."

She looked startled.

"Unhappily," she repeated. "What do you mean by that word?" And she drew back looking very much displeased.

I had expected this and so was not thrown off my guard.

"I mean," I proceeded calmly, "that if you had had such a companion with you on that morning I should now be able to put my question to him, instead of taking up your time and interrupting your affairs by my importunities."

She lost her look of anger and acquired one of doubt. Did she survey me so closely because she was anxious to know if I had compromised her in the eyes of her intended husband? Or was her expression merely that natural to innocence equally startled and perplexed? I could not determine.

"You will tell me just what you mean?" said she earnestly.

I was equally emphatic in my reply.  
"That is only just. You ought to  
know why I trouble you with this matter.  
It is because this letter of  
which I speak was taken from its hiding  
place by some one who went into  
the hotel parlor between the hours of half  
past ten and twelve, and to  
my certain knowledge only three persons  
crossed its threshold on that  
especial morning at that especial time. I  
naturally appeal to each of  
them in turn for an answer to the problem  
that is troubling me. You know  
Miss N. Seeing by accident a letter  
addressed to her lying in a Bible in  
a strange hotel, you might think it your  
duty to take it out and carry  
it to her. If you did and if you lost it----"

"But I didn't," she interrupted warmly. "I  
know nothing about any such  
letter, and if you had not declared so



positively that I was in that hotel on that especial day, I should be tempted to deny that, too, for I have no recollection of going there last month."

"Not for the purpose of rearranging a veil that had been blown off?"

"Oh!" she said, but as one who recalls a forgotten fact, not as one who is tripped up in an evasion.

I began to think her innocent and lost some of the gloom which had been oppressing me.

"You remember now," said I.

"Oh, yes, I remember that."

Her manner so completely declared that her acknowledgments stopped there, I saw it would be useless to venture

further. If she were innocent she could not tell more, if she were guilty she would not; so feeling that the inclination of my belief was in favor of the former hypothesis, I again took her hand and said:

"I see that you can give me no help. I am sorry, for the whole happiness of a man, and perhaps that of a woman also, depends upon the discovery as to who took the letter from out the Bible where I had hidden it on that unfortunate morning." And making her another low bow, I was about to take my departure when she grasped me impulsively by the arm.

"What man?" she whispered, and in a lower tone still, "What woman?"

I turned and looked at her. "Great heaven!" thought I, "can such a face

hide a selfish and intriguing heart?" and in a flash I summoned up in comparison before me the plain, honest, and reliable countenance of Mrs. Couldock and that of the comely and unpretending Miss Dawes, and knew not what to think.

"You do not mean yourself?" she continued as she met my look of distress.

"No," I returned; "happily for me, my welfare is not bound up in the honor of any woman," and leaving that shaft to work its way into her heart if that heart was vulnerable, I took my leave, more troubled and less decided than when I entered.

For her manner had been absolutely that of a woman surprised by insinuations she was too innocent to rate at their real importance; and

yet if she did not take away that letter  
who did? Mrs. Couldock?  
Impossible. Miss Dawes? The thought  
was untenable even for an instant. I  
waited in great depression of spirits for  
the call which I knew Taylor  
would not fail to make me that evening.

When he came I saw what the result of  
my revelations was likely to be as  
plainly as I see it now. He had conversed  
frankly with Mrs. Couldock and  
with Miss Dawes and was perfectly  
convinced as to the utter ignorance of  
them both in regard to the whole affair. In  
consequence, Mrs. Walworth  
was guilty in his estimation, and being  
held guilty could be no wife for  
him, much as he had loved her and urgent  
as may have been the causes for  
her act.

"But," said I, in some horror of the  
consequences of an interference for

which I was almost ready to blame myself now, "Mrs. Couldock and Miss Dawes could have done no more than deny all knowledge of this letter. Now Mrs. Walworth does that, and----"

"You have seen her? You have asked her----"

"Yes, I have seen her and I have asked her, and not an eyelash drooped as she affirmed a complete ignorance of the whole affair."

Taylor's head fell.

"I told you how that would be," he murmured at last. "I cannot feel that it is any proof of her innocence. Or rather," he added, "I should always have my doubts."

"And Mrs. Couldock and Miss Dawes?"

"Ah!" he cried, rising and turning away.  
"There is no question of  
marriage between either of them and  
myself."

I was therefore not astonished when the  
week went by and no announcement  
of his wedding appeared. But I was  
troubled and I am troubled still, for  
if mistakes are made in criminal courts  
and the innocent sometimes  
through the sheer force of circumstantial  
evidence are made to suffer  
for the guilty, might it not be that in this  
latter question of morals,  
Mrs. Walworth has been wronged, and  
that when I played the part of  
arbitrator in her fate, I only succeeded in  
separating two hearts whose  
right it was to be made happy? It is  
impossible to tell. Nor is time  
likely to solve the riddle. Must I then  
forever blame myself, or did I  
only do in this matter what any honest

man would have done in my place?  
Answer me, some one, for I do not find  
my lonely bachelor life in any  
wise brightened by the doubt, and would  
be grateful to any one who would  
relieve me of it.

THE END.

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